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ICEBERG TWO-STEP

poems

By

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B.A., Lake Forest College, 1970

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
MAGELLAN'S OUTCRY . . . . .	1
THE ESKIMO GROWS UP IN KINGSTON, NEW HAMPSHIRE . . . . .	2
YOUNG AMUNDSEN FEELS ALONE . . . . .	3
CHIEF OSHKOSH KEEPS WARM . . . . .	4
LOST INDIANS IN CHICAGO . . . . .	5
FACING WEST . . . . .	6
DANIEL BOONE HAD A DOG NAMED BLAKE . . . . .	7
THE GIRL IN SECRET COVE . . . . .	9
HUDSON'S NEIGHBORS IN JERSEY . . . . .	10
DIANA OF THE DUNES . . . . .	12
PONCE DE LEON TEACHES THE MENTALLY RETARDED TO SWIM . . . . .	14
LETTER TO THE WELFARE OFFICE, BUFFALO MILLS, PENNSYLVANIA . . . .	16
LETTER FROM NEBRASKA . . . . .	17
SOMETHING OPENS FOR ROBERT PEARY . . . . .	19
WATCHING A TORNADO WHILE DRIVING THROUGH BLUE EARTH, MINNESOTA . . . . .	20
THE TOWN THE KICKAPOO INDIANS VISITED . . . . .	21
AUDUBON GOES BACK . . . . .	22
LEWIS & CLARK SLEEP IN A STRANGE ROOM . . . . .	23
IN THIS NEW COUNTRY . . . . .	24
UP THE BEACH WITH STEFANSSON . . . . .	26
BALBOA'S FISHING SONG . . . . .	28

THE ESKIMOS LOOK AT MAPS FOR THE FIRST TIME THEN TALK AMONGST THEMSELVES . . . . .	29
MOVING TO ORIENT, WASHINGTON . . . . .	31

For Dudley, Jim & George  
and Blue & Crazy & Kind.

In our lives we have to pass lots of places along a road. Moving along the road, passing those places, is what we can't avoid. People are always shouting, banging their drum, "It's starting, it's all starting, the show's beginning!" Well, that's just the way they move along the road, that's how they do it.

--Yokomitsu Riichi

When I see a stream I like to say; Exactly.  
Where else could it run? Trace it back to ice.  
Try to find a photo of your cradle.

--Richard Hugo

## MAGELLAN'S OUTCRY

Workers follow wild ducks  
north and south in a chance  
search for jobs and bar-tenders  
are busy. One farmer has followed  
the vegetable harvest right to this  
bar on the ocean. Say you have days  
to spare.

Seagulls look cold  
in their nervous poke for food.  
They can't find anything  
that was born here. Sometimes they  
peer into the window when you  
hold your beer. They remember  
your harvest for you.

Women in the bars want some  
thing too. It's fine because  
not even the sea is satisfied.  
One girl hauls out cards and tea-leaves  
and in the late autumn roar she stirs  
up the long trails of stars and men.



THE ESKIMO GROWS UP  
IN KINGSTON, NEW HAMPSHIRE

In this town the land mass  
seems to be at ease  
but is really humming.

There are motorcycles  
everywhere, and the world  
drives around.

They park the motorcycles  
next to their gardens. They  
go as far as they can  
but not as far as they wish.

People here yell  
at their cucumbers  
people here are hungry.

At night, squash crawl out  
secretly and keep busy. They  
eat up bits of noise left over  
from the day's traffic.

Pumpkins keep company with  
encouraging words. The words  
are from a slow dark language.

## YOUNG AMUNDSEN FEELS ALONE

At midnight the seventh grade,  
dressed for a storm,  
visits the town jail. Unshaven men  
poke through bars of moon  
and grin at you. You are sleepy  
but these are your new teachers.

Your guide points at the imprint  
a beggar's face once made  
when he died, deep and clear  
in the mud. The leaves all around  
smell as if they just fell off trees.  
You've got somebody who loves you.

Out-side the moon comes out  
and puts everyone to sleep.  
The day lilies snore and look  
like the heads of famous people.

## CHIEF OSHKOSH KEEPS WARM

To keep warm in Galena  
you hop a train. Like the old  
bums, you get a fire going.  
Nobody here wants the town  
to change, and all the bars  
have muskets on the wall. Kids  
wear Union caps to school.

The river is too dirty  
to freeze up. You tried everything  
here and puked up years of loss.  
Some things never go away  
so you leave. The girl who helped  
you pack, folded your life carefully  
and hauled it out to the car. Grant  
lived here but left early. Occasionally  
they rebuild his house.

One way to stay warm  
is to go to the railroad bridge.  
There you hop a livestock car  
passing through. You go all the way  
to Chicago, listening to the poems  
that sheep and cattle pass around.

## LOST INDIANS IN CHICAGO

In summer, the mid-west  
nighthawks scare the bored  
and the sun goes down.  
People walk fast and are always  
surprised to see an Indian. It's evening  
and we are all going home.

Folks just call you cloudy. Everyone  
liked you right away but left.  
Even the zoo is closing. Everytime  
you pet a monkey, you're the loser.  
A squirrel crawls on your leg  
and dies. You watch the giraffes  
lie down and yawn at you.

Some Indians, shifting nowhere  
in particular, are safe  
in the black of bars. Some Indians  
sit with the pigeons on a church roof.

## FACING WEST

In St. Ignatius the swallows hit  
the dead-end of the sky  
then turn on themselves. Indians  
thanked the church long ago  
and changed into trees. Boys are tired  
of fishing and throw a dog off the bridge.

This loving is bothersome,  
the dust of this town  
sleeping in the clothes on a chair.  
Twice a day you wash your hair  
so you won't feel lonely, trusting  
the faint wind at the window. Here  
a moan all the way from the river  
asks you out of town.

A girl takes her hand off and gives  
it to you. You set it on the bed  
and mumble. On the tip of every finger  
are friends who never come to visit.  
She puts all her fingers in your mouth,  
they taste like trout  
dropping their eggs  
and making for the sea to die.

## DANIEL BOONE HAD A DOG NAMED BLAKE

Daniel read quietly in the hammock,  
Blake on his lap. That mutt's eyes  
were in the book. The book said:  
When language loses touch with silence  
you get noise. Daniel fell asleep  
with his shirt on.

When he wakes it's unbuttoned,  
half off. Blake did it. Blake grabs  
a stick and runs Daniel the whole yard.  
Daniel chases after, laughing like a horse.  
He slips in the roaring grass and giggles  
himself up. Blake died, he dead.

\* \* \*

Not one cigarette tastes good  
in this bar, not one. There's a mosquito  
in this dark room and people are loud.  
It's beast-time, friend, and I chew  
my nails down to the reptile.

Look buddy, if you move that ash-tray  
the room is messed. I'm on the verge  
of discovering another country. Look,  
there's Carol, she knew Blake. She got  
frozen once before her birth. There's

her bad leg now, bouncing on the stool  
to a strange music. And that is a napkin  
stuck to her dead shoe.

## THE GIRL IN SECRET COVE

I remember fog bending over  
to pat the tiny head of our boat,  
the fish hawk that missed,  
the blue trees far off, coming out when they wanted.  
The girl in secret cove gave us bait forty miles  
from the bridge where a man fought everyone and jumped.  
We saw his face roll slow in the water,  
his hands,  
the last two friends,  
turn toward the sky.  
The girl in secret cove bent low in her nets  
and grabbed herring the size of her hands,  
shiny children spilling out with no names.  
She said she was born in a hurricane and last year  
she lost her shoes off the dock.  
We saw them on the bottom, murky, fish swimming inside  
and mating.  
Near the shore we saw two beavers laughing and clapping  
their famous hands.



## HUDSON'S NEIGHBORS IN JERSEY

Eddie Sperry and his hand  
went home confused that day,  
the time Enoch found him  
fooling with a snake.

The snake went electric  
and grabbed Eddie, the river  
behind his house went mad  
and flooded the graveyard.

Enoch told the cows and  
Eddie to stop hollering.  
"Take the mouth off carefully  
so you don't hurt his teeth,"  
he said. That was the summer  
Eddie sliced off his sister's nose.

\* \* \*

That was the year you, sister,  
drove west. You raced your car  
around the clouds of Butte  
and wrote home.

Everyone out there said you had  
no face. You dreamed of fishermen

hauling up a strange object  
in their nets,

the nets always breaking,  
the unknown thing going out  
of sight. You said you ran  
into Enoch, somewhere in Idaho.

The two of you walked the ponds  
near the freeway. You surprised  
some ducks and they scattered.

Enoch said they'd pair up again.

## DIANA OF THE DUNES

There is a man who has it  
for Diana and she weeps  
for the wilderness. The wilderness  
he knows, has a smile like a flower  
bursting open, literally bursting  
with a real sound; early in the morning.  
Each day he comes down into the city,  
Oh Diana, he says, Drink up and weep  
into the sand and sea.

He burns leaves for the rich.  
They are too rich, he knows,  
to see the geese he sees, always leaving.  
The smell of dead leaves lets him forget  
the world for a little while.  
I promise to meet you, he says,  
when it's too dark to distinguish  
people's faces.

All night he watches the rain.  
The night should have a little animal  
in it, he says, not much can begin  
til you laugh. His nipples get hard  
and itch, like a teenage girl's.  
He falls asleep and his dreams

go bare-foot. Above him in the wet trees  
a cardinal tries to hide and stays all year.

## PONCE DE LEON TEACHES THE MENTALLY RETARDED TO SWIM

And when it's over, go with the child  
to the dressing hut. Make sure he takes  
his friend washcloth with him. If someone  
is there to help him you need not stay  
but if no one in the hut is able to help  
then dress him. Then take him to the person  
in charge of transportation.

After, I drag in the heat. All around  
there are fine trees. This is a willow  
and that is a beech. I go upstream  
the way I did years ago, when the jailer's  
niece ran away with me. She carried the  
local beer.

We laughed when fish spat bubbles  
in the loud butter of the frying pan,  
we said they were not our ancestors.  
We fooled in the blackberries and dreamed  
up a story: the stains on our hands  
were jokes, and different from the shadow  
a face leaves on flesh.

I sit down in the water. The animal  
screams of delight are gone, the kid  
who learned to dive is gone, the girl who

asked the kitty in the water is home asleep.  
Roaring Lion Creek comes in right here,  
as always.

Turtles are back to normal. I put my ears  
under water, to wash out years of wandering.  
I hear a song frogs no longer hide  
about how they want children to pick them up.  
And I see a stable fire walking down the road  
to church. No one home, the lord went swimming.

## LETTER TO THE WELFARE OFFICE, BUFFALO MILLS, PENNSYLVANIA

Since your letter I've been generally speaking on the move. My husband's last known address was at a campground in the White Mountains. The week before that, he got his project cut off and I haven't had any relief since. I personally like him but he isn't a nice guy. He's got several lives going.

I want money quick as I can get it. I have been in bed with the doctor for two weeks, and he doesn't do me no good. If things don't improve I will have to send for another doctor. I asked my mother for some help but she got awkward.

I have not had any clothes for a year and have been visited regularly by the clergy. Maybe I should go again to another state. I am very much annoyed to find that you have branded my girl as illiterate, as this is a dirty lie. I was married to her father a week before she was born.

## LETTER FROM NEBRASKA

for Steve

Friend, it has been dry here  
for so many days now.  
I don't see too well  
and my ducks are hissing.

We farmers watch our fields on the news  
then sweat out the stars. Our kids got out  
by visiting their ocean friends. Raccoons  
I've known for years pant at night. They say:  
Don't talk, it's too hot.

My wife's face is melting. Lately she's been  
looking in the yellow pages under Beauty.  
Peggy's still around and has a job at the bakery.  
She hasn't forgotten Red's death yet.  
Roger is fine as usual, says he needs some loving  
and could I please water his pigs. I'm trying  
to work on the poems again. I guess I'm still  
forgiving, still on fire.

Oh yes, the cat's in heat.  
If there was an aquarium in this town,  
we'd all be there. We wouldn't talk.  
The quiet fish, the damp smells



and the invitations to lust. Friend,  
this is it: I wish you were here.

## SOMETHING OPENS FOR ROBERT PEARY

My friend the local historian  
is out for a stroll. He says  
mammoths continue to roam  
the interior, and, believe it  
or not, ice will dance.  
We're american, we move.

When I was younger we wintered  
on the ice shelf. One morning  
the whole area became detached  
and we drifted into the South Pacific.  
Dogs were the key to everything. They  
tasted excellent, absolutely excellent.

Are you still soft, my porcupine.  
Do you still collect coins like beer  
and wine? My eyes have been stolen  
by a bluejay who drops them in a river.  
No more tossing and no dreaming.  
It's beginning to snow and I'm paying  
attention. I forgot my coat.

WATCHING A TORNADO WHILE DRIVING  
THROUGH BLUE EARTH, MINNESOTA

One by one rivers move east  
the noise in the frog's ear runs south,  
the wind to the door of our car.  
One by one the headlights of cars swoop across fields  
of restless corn and onions crying  
and reach on out to meet their cousin the dawn.  
  
The night-watchman is in the cramped office  
of the American Bridge Company.  
His skin is black sometimes yet today  
is as gray as the wasp nest  
he forgot to have someone do something about,  
the one that whispers to him  
and flies around his coffee cup.

## THE TOWN THE KICKAPOO INDIANS VISITED

After the dust and black throat  
of the journey, you can enter  
a suburb and say it is not  
half-savage. You can get a meal  
and bath, both hot. With neighbors  
so close, you can pretend nothing  
will happen.

If you say your name is "Make-a-Face-  
at-Death," they will search us all.  
They'll take a fresh knife  
and cut from ear to ear  
our suitcases filled with charts,  
our life-studies of the heavens.

They will kick open boxes smaller  
and smaller, and say we do not have  
a name. Try to name things for them  
that can be found: Earthquake, ice-berg,  
passion. Watch carefully while they wrap  
their fish in the thin sacred map  
of our hometown.

## AUDUBON GOES BACK

Each time you tell yourself the house  
is easy to know, you remember its cough.  
You sleep in your bed and it falls apart.  
Your old room smells like parrot crap,  
remember that parrot who died from shouting?

Outside, the Mormon house is now a bar,  
and someone shut the dairy down. People see  
you and mistake your name for someone dead.  
The river is too smart to freeze up.

Since you've been home, the lice have found you  
and whispered about your heart. Your grandmother  
told you beggars marked the houses that give.  
You've tried everything, even old girlfriends.

You walk all around the house. The dead plants  
are quieter than usual. The ugliest man in town  
still wants out. Don't give your heart  
to anyone, you say. Not even animals.

## LEWIS &amp; CLARK SLEEP IN A STRANGE ROOM

Friends go to the ocean  
to gain back a little honesty,  
friends you have not seen  
for a long time. You dream  
everything boring and let the light  
of the aquarium rub your white belly.

The town you are staying in  
is beyond, and beyond is forever.  
There is no one here to tip your boots  
over and spill the day out. No one  
to talk to, not even the fish.

The fish roll over and over  
in their bed. The maps on the floor  
are waiting to leave, and the Indian  
with the different language is snoring.  
You pretend the bed you are in  
is empty, but there you are. You and the fish  
who hum their way out.

## IN THIS NEW COUNTRY

The legs of the spider feel  
a storm, and leaves fall  
on the foreheads of cabbage.  
Here in this fresh graveyard  
you bend quiet and mad  
toward friends who will not  
inquire further. That churchbell  
has an insincere ring.

Right now a bird asks how old  
you are, and you say late.  
Right now is not far from where  
they were caught in a wreck  
on the Union Pacific. All they  
found to bury were two left arms.

They were good harvest-hands  
when the field was gold, and tramps  
when it was stubble. Like you,  
they brought the right tools: eyes,  
hands, the poor genitals. Now in some  
corner of the heart which has no  
doorway, you walk back to town.  
Restaurants, men carrying birds,

pigeons looking for mates. Harbor  
boats at rest.



## UP THE BEACH WITH STEFANSSON

I have known you one hundred  
years going mad  
your father his father  
walking along the sea, pants wet,  
fiddler crabs pale at night with love,  
the sea dizzies your toes  
and ten thousand lives.

Near the ocean on a Seattle street  
the chinaman who is related to you  
is dead asleep in a chinese newspaper  
dreaming oriental, dreaming revenge,  
his mouth red and open  
to early morning bees.

In a parking lot some girls  
stand in cold wind and stare  
at a mechanic's long eye-lashes.  
He changes their tire. Up the beach  
plovers work between the moon  
and its lonely tide.

In Ohio as a child  
you ate yourself up  
with the bitterness of acorns  
and threw rocks at squirrels  
on their invisible highways  
far into trees.

You squeezed fish with bodies  
the length of women's fingers  
and in a loud rage  
you learned to stick a straw  
up a frog's ass, blow in air  
and watch it scoot across  
a dull summer pond.

I see you now, sitting  
on a small porch near the ocean,  
holding a skin magazine on your lap.  
Inside it, the pink round girls  
are ignorant of cancer and bunions,  
indifferent to tornados. Here comes  
your cat, to jump in your lap,  
interrupting. You let him bite your arm,  
the mark looks like a red stone. And here,  
when you turn the page, is the girl  
who will drive you mad.

.

## BALBOA'S FISHING SONG

Vaguely I remember Aprils  
and the accidents. Men held  
their balls and women  
covered their faces. At the lake  
the fish curled our toes while my dog  
Happy snapped the air out of turtles.

It's winter now, freezing.  
I'm in the bathroom with fishing maps  
on my knees. California is small  
and Montana is a tiny country  
to step over. Idaho so thin and cold  
the lovemaking of neighbors tells  
more than I want to know.

Every slow evening between seasons  
my friends go crazy and change  
my name. They say: How you gettin it,  
daddy long guilt? Having fun  
desperate one? They say: Eat the huge  
worms caught in a can,  
and wait for love.

THE ESKIMOS LOOK AT MAPS FOR THE FIRST TIME  
THEN TALK AMONGST THEMSELVES

Maps go from here to here.  
Down this hanging rock cliff  
where years ago  
the largest rock of all  
sighed and slid into the river,  
it woke the sleepy people.  
Everyone lives alone.

Settlers once heard old footsteps  
and dug for gold in this bluff.  
Indians left love in the river  
and notes: Gold isn't out-doors  
like you feel,

On top of the cliff  
leaves touch your face and fall.  
They feel like a dog's nose you bend over  
to love. A storm walks up the backbone  
of the forest, and you hope it will fly  
out the top. It stumbles into the river.

You think someone dead colored the map.  
Here's the place where you found  
the dead raccoon. Remember, the fur  
swelled toward you? You took the guts

and broken hair to your house and cried.

You drink, friend, for the wrong reasons,

I've never seen you dance.

## MOVING TO ORIENT, WASHINGTON

The house quiet now where yesterday  
someone moved it, on two trucks  
or three trucks, moved it slow  
and careful from another state.  
Quiet now with birds chattering  
and the trees leaning away, not sure.

Here is a chance, with the cartons  
still roped up, the dishes, quiet clothes  
and books. To write you this letter.  
I must do it before the oranges find  
their right place on the kitchen table,  
before our neighbors come over  
and ask to see our worm-eaten maps.  
Before they poke at our children,  
who are part animal.

Dear Nancy, life is hard. For all my  
topographical errors, my bootless retreats  
and wrong addresses, I am moved to consider  
something large and happy. We are ordinary,  
you and I, with our foliage underground.  
Thank God for discovery and thank you  
for the hollow metal globe of the world.  
The one, you said, cut in two, would make  
two fine camp kettles for an invading army.